



We must implement the action plan
we promised at the Japan-North America Missionary Forum
to work together for peace
that does not depend on military power.



We are from the West-Chugoku District (Hiroshima, Yamaguchi and Shimane prefectures) of the United Church of Christ in Japan. In our district, we have the A-bombed city Hiroshima and a US military base called Iwakuni.

US Marine Corps fighter troops, the US Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan's carrier planes and troops, and 120 fighter planes are deployed at Iwakuni. They conduct trainings close to actual battle conditions every day. Area residents suffer from roaring and sonic booms day and night due to these exercises, and live in fear of accidents.

We have endeavored in various ways to reform this situation. The "Joint Statement" adopted by the Japan-North America Missionary Forum in March 2007, and the associated "Action Plan" promised great hope. We saw those as the start of concrete joint efforts to promote God's peace through Jesus, transcending national boundaries. However, churches in Japan have yet to begin even their first action. Therefore, we are hereby communicating the situation surrounding the US military base at Iwakuni to churches outside of Japan; we are calling on you to help us initiate joint activity for peace.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." (Matthew 5:9)

June, 2021
Standing Committee
Western-Chugoku District,
The United Church of Christ in Japan

Action Plan adopted by the Japan-North America Missionary Forum

1. In response to Japan's heightening nationalism, we will strive to jointly carry out the following tasks:
 - 1) Churches in Japan shall work on issues Japan faces today, including revision of Article 9 of Japan's Peace Constitution, distortions of history, new fingerprinting requirements of foreigners, problems related to US military bases; they will enable churches in North America to have and share salient information.
 - 2) Churches in North America shall share information with church members, ecumenical organizations, and religious media.
 - 3) Japan's ecumenical partners will invite a delegation of churches from North America.

March 29, 2007

All attendee of Japan-North America Missionary Forum

Presbyterian Church of Canada
United Church of Canada
Presbyterian Church of USA
United Methodist Church
United Church of Christ of USA
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ in the USA and Canada)
Reformed Church in America
The United Church of Christ in Japan
The United Church of Koreans in Japan
The Japan Christian Social Work Federation
The School Conference for Mission Cooperation



The US military base at Iwakuni, one of the largest in East Asia

INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, aircraft troops from the US Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan were transferred from Atsugi to Iwakuni. As a result, the number of military aircraft deployed at Iwakuni more than doubled to about 180. It is rare anywhere in the world that US Marine and Naval forces share a base. This situation is a result of an offshore runway relocation project started in 1996. This project filled 213 hectares of ocean, expanding the area of Iwakuni Base by 1.4 times.

The original purpose of the runway relocation project was to reduce noise and accidents. However, after the carrier-based aircraft and troops from Atsugi and in-air refueling craft and troops from Futenma were transferred to Iwakuni in accordance with the Reorganization of the United States Military agreed by Japan and the US in May 2006, residents near the base are suffering from far more noise than ever before.

The suffering is not limited to the base. Sonic booms and other explosive noises caused by the take-offs and landings at and flights from Iwakuni extend widely through Hiroshima Prefecture, including right over

Hiroshima's sacred world

heritage site, Miyajima Island, and even beyond. US military training airspace enters Shimane and Yamaguchi prefectures as well.

In October 2019, the Hiroshima High Court has found this noise to be illegal because the suffering exceeds reasonable limits of endurance for residents. And yet, because the noise is produced by the US military, suspensions of flights have not been allowed. Thus, residents around the base and far further afield are continually exposed to explosive noise.



The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan



Centuries ago, Iwakuni was built on land with few flat fields. Most of the area is hilly, rocky ground. In the 1600s, large landfill projects were conducted as farmers sought to expand their farms and residences. In 1937, however, when the Sino-Japanese War broke out, the farmers' reclaimed land was seized for an Imperial Japanese Navy air base. Large scale bombing by the allied forces was carried out around the Iwakuni railway

station on August 14, 1945, but the base itself suffered very little damage. When WWII was over, allied forces and US Marine Corps troops were stationed at that base, which has been used as a US military base ever since. Iwakuni was a core facility for dispatching troops to fight in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the Iraq War.

OFFSHORE RUNWAY RELOCATION UNDER THE PRETEXT OF REDUCING NOISE AND ACCIDENTS

A Phantom, a US fighter plane, crashed onto the grounds of Kyushu University in 1968. Phantoms were also deployed at Iwakuni, so safety measures for accidents and noise became an urgent issue. Citizens raised their voices demanding that the base be relocated. In response, the governments of the US and Japan together carried out an "Offshore Runway Relocation Project." The plan was to reclaim land from the sea and place the runway 1km offshore from the base.

before the reclamation work was completed in October 2005, in an interim report appeared regarding the Reorganization of the US Military, which was agreed by both governments. This plan called for transferring carrier-borne planes and troops from Atsugi to Iwakuni. The Offshore Relocation Project that was originally intended to alleviate the problems of accidents and noise ended up increasing the number of military planes and the accompanying noise.

05 | However, immediately

To obtain earth and sand for the Offshore Relocation Project, approximately one half of Atagoyama Hill (formerly 120 meters above sea level in central Iwakuni City) was scraped down. It now stands only 60 meters above sea level. According to the original plan, after all this earth was taken, Iwakuni would be given, on that shortened hill, a "twenty-first century residential district" with schools, houses and a shopping center. However, as soon as the mountain top was removed, the New Town Development Project was halted, and the site was sold to Japan's Ministry of Defense. The plan was altered to provide houses and athletic facilities for US military personnel, ignoring all opposition by area residents. As a result, 262 US military houses were built, each of which stands on about 200 square meters of land and cost approximately 90 million yen (\$900,000). A baseball stadium and other sports facilities were built one after the next, all of them for the benefit of US military personnel. To make matters worse, most of those houses are usually empty.

To expand and strengthen Iwakuni Base, more than 800 billion yen (\$8,000,000,000) was invested in the Offshore Relocation Project, the Atagoyama Development Project, and other projects over the course of 10 years. The cost is entirely borne by Japanese taxpayers.

ATAGOYAMA HOUSING DEVELOPMENT



Old runway New runway Large wall

Today, despite a financial crisis that is causing severe cuts to welfare and medical benefits, the Japanese government continues to invest tremendous sums in the "sympathy budget" for US armed forces.

The transfer of carrier-borne planes and troops from Atsugi to Iwakuni resulting from the Reorganization of the US Military agreed to by the US and Japanese governments in October 2005, sparked intense opposition from surrounding municipalities. Iwakuni City held a “Referendum on the transfer of carrier-borne planes and troops to Iwakuni,” conducted by the Mayor in March 2006. Ninety percent of voters voted against the referendum, clearly indicating their disapproval. The will of the residents was firmly against accepting the enlarged base.

In response, the national government used money

to fight the people. It cut the subsidy for construction of a new Iwakuni City Office Building. This economic attack effectively divided city residents using candy (the subsidy) and the whip (pressure).

Iwakuni citizens’ earnest desire was for a city where future generations would live in peace without the sonic booms of warplanes and without the crimes and accidents brought by soldiers—a hometown that would never be a base for future wars. This overwhelming majority desire was ignored. The transfer of over 60 US Navy planes from Atsugi was forced through and implemented in 2017 and 2018.

NOISE EVEN MORE INTENSE

In addition to the carrier-borne planes, Iwakuni is now used for training pilots of the vertical take-off and landing transport plane MV22 Osprey. The Osprey is prohibited from flying over residential areas in the US. In Iwakuni, Ospreys fly over residential areas, and the people below are exposed to loud low-frequency noise and the known danger of Osprey crashes.

In addition, the Hornet, a US Marine Corps aircraft, has been replaced by the Super Hornet, which is even louder.

F-35B stealth fighters are also deployed, exposing residents

to extremely intense roaring sounds. And, whenever an aircraft carrier anchors at Yokosuka, carrier-borne planes come to Iwakuni for training flights deep into the night, bringing serious harm from sleep disturbance for residents near the base. In November 2019, serious rule violations were revealed when a collection of “selfies” came to light showing pilots reading or shaving during their flights.

In addition, the US military built a new port that can berth large warships and other vessels. This port makes Iwakuni one of the largest military bases in East Asia.



FOR A CITY LIVABLE IN PEACE

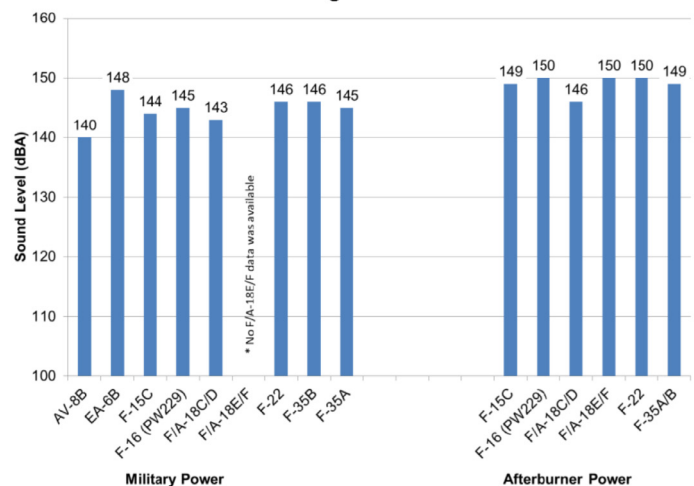
All around Iwakuni dangerous training is preparing soldiers for war. In 2017, in the sky over downtown Iwakuni, many residents watched in horror as a carrier-borne Super Hornet chased after a Marine Corps Hornet, as if they were in a real war.

When soldiers from Iwakuni commit crimes or cause accidents, the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement takes jurisdiction away from Japan. No legitimate trial is possible. As a result, Iwakuni citizens fear US soldiers and their families. This fear is stronger than friendship.

The residents living around Iwakuni desire a society where they can live with a sense of security without suffering the roaring, exploding noises of war. We hope that churches in Japan and churches in North America will work together to promote true peace that does not depend on military power.

Many Japanese churches are ready to begin this work. Please contact us at:

Aircraft Ground Noise Figure 1



(PENTAGON)

